

SKAGWAY BANK SURVIVES ATTEMPTED ROBBERY AND EXPLOSION!

Ronald Greene

In the past year the above-signed was fortunate enough to acquire a group of five large photographs taken by Case & Draper of Skagway. They illustrate what may be considered one of the most bizarre incidents in Canadian banking history. The story that is unfolded below is taken from Victor Ross' magnificent "History of the Canadian Bank of Commerce."¹ To further illustrate this short note, a cheque on the Skagway, or as it was then commonly spelled, Skaguay, branch is reproduced.² This branch was opened as an agency on December 30, 1898, made a branch June 27, 1902 and closed September 30, 1910.

"...few such incidents ("hold-ups") have been attended by such extraordinary circumstances as the one which occurred on September 15, 1902, at the branch in Skagway, Alaska.... Skagway is situated on the Lynn Canal, one of the outlets of the great gold country of the Yukon, and at this period the branch did a large business with prospectors going into or coming out of the gold country. One the day in question the office was in charge of two men, George Wallace, a veteran of the South African War, and Charles R.W. Pooley, who afterwards saw service in France. Toward closing time a stranger walked into the bank, and producing a stick of dynamite asked Wallace if he knew what it was. Wallace, thinking the man was joking, replied, 'Yes, dynamite.' The visitor then demanded that Wallace give him \$20,000 instantly, or he would blow up the bank, enforcing his demand by whipping out a revolver and levelling it at Wallace.



"Wallace's South African experience had taught him coolness, and he turned to go into the teller's cage as if to comply. Quick as a flash he called out to Pooley, 'Look out, he's got a gun,' and bolted the back door. Pooley at the same time jumped behind the open door of a large safe. The man fired at both of them, but the shots when wild, one of them striking the steel stanchion in the teller's cage and two others entering the wall of the office. Almost simultaneously a terrific explosion occurred, the firing of the revolver having exploded the stick of dynamite which the man held in his hand, as well as some he carried in his pockets. The office was a

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¹ pp 285-288, volume II

² Courtesy of Donald M. Stewart, this is one of the few surviving items known from the branch

EDITORIAL

Suddenly I feel very old. This begins our 25th year. I would like to thank those of you who promptly renewed your subscription, committing me to another year of drudgery. Well, not really. If this was not enjoyable, I would have given this up a long time ago.

I often wonder when the information is going to run out. There were several years where it seemed like I was writing every other article. But last year was one of the easiest for your editor. It is easy if all I have to do is type in an article, without having to write it. And this year is shaping up the same way.

This month we are treated to a bank robbery gone bad. Ron Greene discovered this, and then you editor discovered it lost in his file. The numismatic tie-in is the check that is illustrated with the article.

Next month we have an article about J.W. Little and Latouche, by a new subscriber, Mike Hankins of Anchorage (we need more like this - new subscribers and writers!). On the back burner are articles about Greens Creek Mine and Dominic Verneti. And when all else fails, we have enough for issues on the Falklands, Tierra del Fuego and Antarctica. So keep those articles about Alaska and Yukon numismatica coming.

Alaska & Yukon Stocks and Bonds should be available about the first of February. Look for an announcement in the next issue of the newsletter. If nothing else, we will have established a price, and will accept advanced orders.

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2002 GANDER TOKEN



The 21st in an annual series of municipal trade tokens featuring well known types of aircraft has been issued by the Gander and Area Chamber of Commerce. Gander International Airport played a major role as a refueling and maintenance base in World War II.

The \$2 municipal trade token was struck on 33mm nickel-bonded-steel blanks.

The token commemorates the 65th anniversary of the first commercial, transatlantic passenger flight, which took place on July 5, 1937. The plane refueled at Botwood, Newfoundland and crossed the Atlantic in 12½ hours, landing at Foynes Island in Ireland. Gander was the alternate refueling site in case of bad weather at Botwood. A number of flights later used Gander Lake.

The Pan Am Clipper III, a Sikorsky S42B Flying Boat which made this historic crossing is featured on the obverse of the token. Sikorsky S-42 Flying Boat first flew in March 1934. In 1937, a much improved model S42B began service with Pan American Airways. The Pan Am Clipper III provided sleeping accommodations to carry 14 people in a deluxe cabin setting across the North Atlantic.

The reverse shows the flying goose logo of Gander. The token was designed by Greg Seaward.

The 2002 \$2 token is available postpaid for \$2.75 from the Gander and Area Chamber of Commerce, 109 Trans Canada Highway, Gander, Newfoundland, Canada A1V 1P6. A gold plated, NBS version is also available for \$10.10.

-Jerry Remick

BANK ROBBERY, CONT.

total wreck, a large hole four feet across being blown in the floor and all the plaster falling from the walls and ceiling. The glass was blown out of the windows and the manger's room and its furniture were almost completely destroyed. The absence of that officer at Whitehorse probably saved his life. The walls of the building were sprung out of place and several holes appeared in the ceiling of the office. The bank's solicitor was just leaving the building when he heard the shots fired, and turning to re-enter, he was struck in the face by pieces of glass from the door and knocked down by the force of the explosion.

"The noise of the exploding dynamite echoed and re-echoed from the precipitous sides of the mountains which wall in the town on two sides, and this and the ringing of the fire bell brought most of the inhabitants to the scene. Very promptly the officers of some of the companies of United States Artillery, who were stationed in the town, threw a cordon of their men around the building, a precaution by no means unnecessary, because the gold dust, coins and fragments of the paper currency, which had formed the contents of the teller's cash box, were strewn all over the roadway and the floor of the building. Fortunately the perpetrator of the outrage was the only person seriously injured. He was picked up in a dying condition about ten feet from the spot where the dynamite had exploded, given medical attention and taken to the hospital as soon as possible, but he never recovered consciousness. Despite the efforts of the local authorities, his name was never ascertained, although he was recognized as having spent some days gambling in the various saloons about town. He had carefully laid his plans for escaping, having made an appointment with a boatman to meet him at twenty minutes after three that afternoon,



and row him over to Dyea. Curiously enough, a stick of dynamite, unexploded, was found on the floor opposite Wallace's wicket, and a setter dog belonging to Pooley, which had been lying under a small table in the teller's box within a foot or so of the hole in the floor, crawled out uninjured.

"The damage to the bank's property proved comparatively light. Although a considerable number of vouchers in the teller's cage were blown into small pieces and his cash was scattered all over the roadway

and the floor of the office, by careful examination most of the fragments of the vouchers and paper currency were pieced together, the gold coins were carefully gathered up and the gold dust, of which a considerable quantity happened to be lying on the teller's counter, was saved by a unique expedient. All debris, which had been carefully guarded by the United States soldiers, was collected, and the splinters, broken plaster and fragments were put through a miniature sluice box similar to that used in an ordinary placer mine. The result was that a quarter of an ounce more gold dust was recovered from the ruins than was supposed to have been on hand before the explosion.

"About an hour after the explosion an officer from the Whitehorse branch, who had been instructed to relieve the Skagway manager during his annual furlough, arrived by railway. He was told by the conductor of the train what had occurred and found the bank building surrounded by a curious mob. He at once took charge, and after arranging for a continuance of the military guard, set to work to get things in shape to resume business on the morrow. When the books and documents had been gathered together, carpenters were set to work to shore up the ceiling and prevent the contents of the

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BANK ROBBERY,^{CONT.}

upper story from sliding down into the office. Canvas was stretched across the front of the building, sentries were posted inside and out, and with a barricade of desks and other furniture arranged diagonally across the office, the bank opened for business promptly at 10 o'clock next morning. About midnight the previous evening,

while partaking of a hasty meal in a restaurant, the relieving officer overheard a miner at a neighboring table say to his companion 'Well partner, I guess I'll take my money out of the bank that was blown up, in the morning.' Taking a good look at the speaker on his way out, the officer kept a watch for him in the morning. The



two comrades came in early, and seemed surprised to find that there was still money left with which to do business. On one of the men enquiring whether he could withdraw his deposit he was told that he certainly could, and after filling out the necessary voucher, he took the money. Immediately he wished to re-de-

posit it, but was met with a firm refusal, being told that if he was too scarred to keep a few hundred dollars in the Canadian Bank of Commerce, he had better keep it in his pocket. By this time quite a few men were in line for a similar purpose..."

Thus was stopped a small run on the bank. This is just one of the incidents related by Victor Ross in the chapter he entitled, "The Romance of Banking."

FORM A. C. 101. 2-25-22-10M.		PAY CHECK NO. <u>9748</u>	
CASHIER		PACIFIC CONTRACT CO., Ltd.	
		Skaguay, Alaska, <u>1899</u>	
Pay to _____		P. R. No. _____ or Bearer.	
		Dollars, \$ _____	
IN FULL PAYMENT FOR SERVICES RENDERED SAID COMPANY DURING THE MONTH, AND UP TO THE CLOSE OF LAST DAY, OF _____			
To Canadian Bank of Commerce,		PACIFIC CONTRACT CO., (LTD.)	
SKAGUAY, ALASKA		CHIEF ENGINEER AND SUPERINTENDENT	
NOT GOOD UNTIL COUNTERSIGNED BY CASHIER			
COUNTERSIGNED			

FUR RENDEZVOUS GOODIES!



The items above appeared on eBay just before Christmas. No sizes were given. Two black on red children's 10 cents ticket, and three black on green/blue "Gold Certificate Fun Money" were offered. Price realized was \$30.00. This is the earliest numismatic type item we have seen from Fur Rendezvous. It is really interesting to see the use of the term "Moose Gooser." Sizes are not known.

NEW YEAR SPECIAL!!!



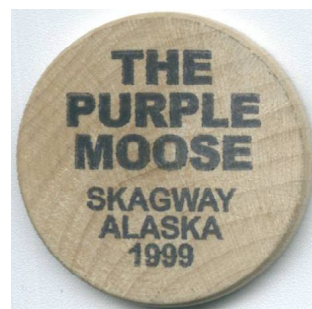
We have been purchasing very little Alaska material lately, but the official Alaska Purchase Centennial sets seem to be in every collection locally! The set consists of a silver and a bronze medal. The large silver medal contains over 5 ounces of silver.

We are offering this set in a Capital Plastics holder as shown above for \$125; in the original boxes for \$99 and loose, with no packaging for \$85. This is a great opportunity. Twenty years ago, these sets sold for around \$200!

FOR THE RECORD



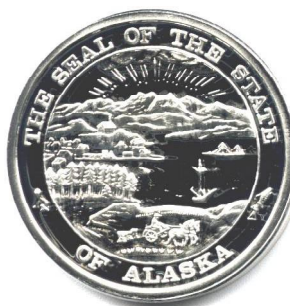
(FAIRBANKS): Eagle's 1037, \$1 in trade, gold on blue, approximately 38mm (submitted by Henry Parker).



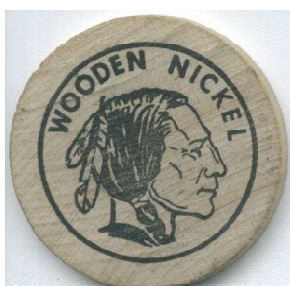
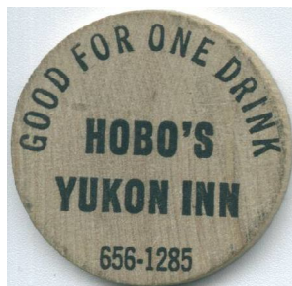
SKAGWAY: The Purple Moose, 1999. Purple on wood (submitted by Henry Parker).



FAIRBANKS: Issued to note the 25th anniversary of Seekins' Ford-Lincoln-Mercury. 1 ounce pure silver.



ALASKA: Presented by the Commander. One ounce silver medal.



(GALENA): Hobo's Yukon Inn, good for one drink, black on wood (submitted by Henry Parker).



ALASKA: Iditarod Sled Dog Race, 2003, "Eyes to the Future," Anchorage-Nome. One ounce pure silver.



(PALMER): Mat-Su College, Toss for Tuition, Alaska State Fair, Good for 1 Tomahawk Toss. Blue on wood (submitted by Dave Phillips).



UNKNOWN: Brass ID tag marked E.E. Perdue, 574-01-4213. Number appears to be a Social Security number.

FOR THE RECORD



FAIRBANKS: Fairbanks Daily News-Miner 2002, annual Christmas one ounce silver.



SEATTLE: Now here is a pseudo-whorehouse token we have not seen. Diamond Lil's from Seattle, brass, 38mm. Very similar fabrication to others we have seen over many years (submitted by Jim Robb).



MAVERICK: Pioneer Baths, 25¢ in trade, aluminum, 25mm. Reported earlier by Henry Parker as being from Ruby. Now, Jim Robb of Whitehorse chimes in. He believes it is from Pioneer Steam Baths, Dawson. Aren't mavericks fun! OK, the two contestants will square off at midnight on February 29th in Fort Yukon (neutral ground) to settle this once and for all!



(DOUGLAS): Harbor Washboard, (good for) 1 Shower. Brass, 23mm, uniface (Kaye Dethridge).



MAVERICK: Hibbs Cheiro bifacial, brass 21mm. Les Hill reports that a hoard of these turned up in Dawson in 1962. It is the right size for a machine token. Actual use in Yukon is not known. Another recent find for Jim Robb.



(ANCHORAGE): Roy's Coins, Good in trade 50¢. Copper-nickel, 32.5mm. (Hey Doug, weren't you supposed to write something up on this?).

PRICES REALIZED

Selected prices realized from eBay:

Cordova , Windsor Hotel, B-41c (BIN \$275)	96.00ns
Ketchikan , Blue Fox Pup, B-6e	23.72
Ketchikan , Scoug's, B-56d	60.00
Kodiak , Brown Bear Bus, B-T1aI	8.51
McCarthy , Golden Hotel, B-2b	26.00
Palmer , P.C.C. 10 (Palmer Correctional Center)	77.76
Seldovia , Cash Store, B-5a	35.00
Seward , Pioneer Club, B-10aII	125.00ns
Valdez , Copper Block, B-4b	28.00
Valdez , Northern, B-15a,	12.50ns
ns = no sale; BIN = Buy it now	



NEWFOUNDLAND: Reported March, 2002 with incorrect size. Actual size is 51mm.